THE REPORTER

NEWS

Program piloted by Vacaville prison to be implemented across the state

Program to provide training, create 1,000 inmate jobs



California Medical Facility inmate, Artis Fitzpatrick cleans a window of one of the offices in the hospice wing at the prison. Fitzpatrick is a participant in the California Prison Industry Authority's Healthcare Facilities Maintenance Program. The program which was started at CMF in 2012 teaches imates the skills that they can take to the world once they are paroled and turn it into a career in facilities maintenance.

Joel Rosenbaum -- The Reporter

By Catherine Mijs May 27, 2014

Artis Fitzpatrick didn't always like to clean.

In fact, he used to think of cleaning as a task better left for his sister to do.

On Thursday, however, as the hum of floor buffers echoed off the walls inside Vacaville's California Medical Facility, Fitzpatrick was hard at work cleaning — and enjoying it.

"I'm pretty sure I could show her something new, now," the 53-year-old joked.

Fitzpatrick has spent the past two and a half years as one of the 30 inmates who make up the prison's CALPIA Healthcare Facilities Maintenance Program.

"For me, it's like a wakeup call. I'm learning all that I can and as much as I can," said Fitzpatrick, who said he highly recommends the program to others.

After spending the last 32 years behind bars after being convicted of murder, the Los Angeles native said he hopes to employ the skills he has learned in the program and turn them into a job once he is released.

Inmates in the program, which was piloted at CMF in January 2012, are responsible for all of the cleaning and sanitizing of the prison's healthcare units, and can be found hard at work during seven hour shifts, seven days a week, according to Paul Esau of CALPIA who supervises the inmates.

According to CALPIA administrator Mark Stewart, CMF was chosen to pilot the program because of the prison's "recognized need" as one of the state's largest medical facilities.

Even more importantly than having a first-hand role in the cleanliness of the prison, the inmates learn a number of skills that can easily translate to a job once they are released, Stewart said.

Now, after more than two years in effect at CMF — with proven results — state officials have OK'd the use of the healthcare

facilities maintenance program for use at prisons across California, according to Michele Kane, a spokeswoman for California Prison Industry Authority (CALPIA).

"The Health Care Facilities Maintenance Program is just a wonderful program. We're actually meeting standardized cleanliness in all the institutions, as well as providing programming slots for 1,000 offenders," Kane said.

The program also provide milestone credits up to six weeks of sentence reduction for offenders who complete the program, according to Kane.

And the numbers speak for themselves, she added.

"These programs are proven to reduce recidivism. Our numbers, it's 26 to 38 percent lower than the average offender," said Kane, noting that recidivism for the average offender is 61 percent.

"And when they leave prison, they can work at hospitals, DDS, private sector. The only two places that the offenders will not be able to work is at the state capitol and at the Department of Justice," she added.

As an additional incentive to inmates, there are certain certifications they can achieve, including, industrial safety and health, chemical hazard, cleaning chemicals, floors and floor-care equipment, maintaining floors and other surfaces, restroom car and carpet and other upholsteries.

Once in the program, the inmates are provided with different types of training, with a special emphasis on safety training, blood-borne pathogens and standard cleaning procedures from various situations that would be applicable in healthcare settings outside the prison's walls, Stewart explained.





"They have programs they basically set up with the thought in mind to create meaningful jobs that allow inmates skills and certification of those skills, so that when they get out into the real world they can make a good living and not have to reoffend," he said.

For inmate Tracy Smith, who has spent the last five years at CMF, it is the training within the program, offered three times each week, that truly sets it apart.

"That's the difference in a PIA-trained hospital/janitorial person from a regular person out here on the line," said Smith, noting the extensive training and leadership training courses involved in the program.

"There's a procedure about how to work, what chemicals to use. There's different applications for what we do, and that's what sets us apart: we are trained to work in the hospital, in the hospital setting," Smith said.

Before joining the program, Smith said he knew virtually noth-

ing about chemicals and janitorial work.

"Now I know, I've graduated, I've made it through the training and I'm going to take this training back to the streets," said Smith, a non-violent three-strike offender most recently convicted of burglary.

"I love my job," said Smith, a lead man on the special projects group.

For Smith, who has been a part of a number of other CALPIA programs, no matter what task he sets his hand to, he always does his best.

"It doesn't matter if I'm deep sea diving or if I'm doing janitorial work here in the prison, I do the same, I put the same effort in, I put my all into it," he said.

In addition to having had "a significant impact" on the cleanliness of CMF, the program will "help with the court order 2002 settlement agreement, Plata v. Brown, ensuring every inmate receives adequate health care services in a clean and sanitary environment," according to Kane.

The approval of the governor's budget proposal by the California Senate and Assembly budget subcommittees will fund an agreement between the California Correctional Health Care Services (CCHCS) and CALPIA to roll out the Health-care Facilities Maintenance Program at all 34 institutions, according to Kane. The program is expected to be in place at all institutions by March 2015.

"Training offenders with valuable job skills is what we have been doing for over 70 years," said CALPIA's General Manager, Charles L. Pattillo. "This program will provide not only certifications and vocational training to offenders so they can make a successful transition, it also keeps prisons and communities safer."



